

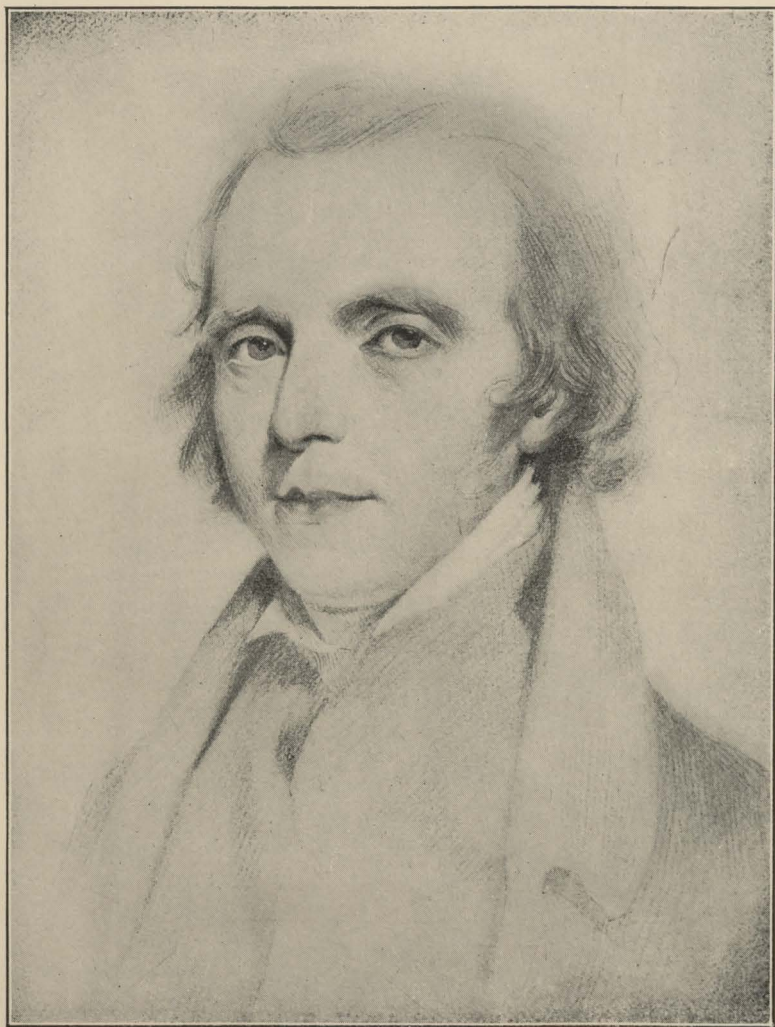


JOHN FLAXMAN, R. A.



W. W. Kent

1918



JOHN FLAXMAN, R. A.

BY

*Sir Thomas Lawrence, P. R. A.*

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CATALOGUE  
OF AN EXHIBITION OF  
ORIGINAL DRAWINGS

BY

JOHN FLAXMAN, R. A.

1755-1826

Frick Art Reference Library

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## JOHN FLAXMAN\*

THE ostentatious Johnsonian biographies written at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, furnish us with the thread of a charming narrative of John Flaxman's childhood. We first come upon him as a pathetic little figure, sitting among the huge white plaster casts of antique sculpture which his father made at the Sign of the Golden Head, on New Street, Covent Garden. John Flaxman, senior, descended according to tradition from an old English family that fought at Naseby, worked for Roubiliac, Scheemakers and other artists and had opened the shop six months after he left the city of York, where his invalid boy was born on July 6, 1755. There was an elder son, William, but of him we learn next to nothing except that he too became a sculptor and woodcarver, and the boys were brought up by a stepmother who appears to have treated them very kindly. The moulages of the ancient masters were their playfellows, and such an environment naturally turned all their thoughts to

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\* A portion of this essay, appeared with illustrations, October, 1918, in *The International Studio*, and is reprinted by the kind permission of the John Lane Company.

sculpture. Visitors and customers, as so often happens, were interested only in John, the precocious sick child, whom they invariably discovered modelling, copying medals or poring over the classics. His future biographer, John Thomas Smith, the gossipy keeper of the prints and drawings in the British Museum, met and encouraged the boy when he was six years old. Romney, the distinguished painter, stroked his locks, evinced an interest in his future career, gave him sound artistic advice and offered to be useful to him in a pecuniary way. Then the Reverend Mr. Henry Mathew, of Percy Chapel, Charlotte Street, while under the spell of Winckelmann, came to order casts of Greek sculpture, and discovered the ill-shapen weakling on crutches, coughing and reading Latin, and taking impressions from seals. Soon afterwards, we hear that the rickety lad is translating Homer with Mrs. Mathew, and is a centre of interest to the witty frequenters of her fashionable salon on Rathbone Place.

England was then enjoying the classical revival which Alexander Pope's rhymed translation of Homer had started, and Flaxman, sitting at the knees of his patroness, made drawings illustrating favourite passages in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and secured through her a first com-

mission to execute some Homeric designs for a Mr. Crutchley of Sunninghill Park. Too weak to attend school, he managed with the aid of such friends to acquire the rudiments of a good education, and at the age of thirteen his model in clay won the first prize, a gold "pallett," offered by the Society of Arts, a success which was repeated in the following year with a basso-relievo. Thereafter he was a frequent exhibitor at the Free Society of Artists in Pall Mall, and at the Royal Academy, which had awarded him a pupil's Silver Medal designed by Cipriani, "for a model of an Academy figure," in 1769. He was not studying with any particular master at the Academy schools, and when it came to a competition for the gold medal in 1772, Sir Joshua Reynolds bestowed it on a pupil who did nothing of importance in his later career to justify the president's choice. This reverse infuriated the rather conceited lad, but otherwise it had a salutary effect upon his character. The adulation of such distinguished women as Mrs. Barbauld, Mrs. Montagu and Mrs. Chapone, who came to Mrs. Mathew's reunions, was a dangerous experience for a feeble child. As he grew older, however, his health mended, his hobble disappeared and, although he was never fitted for games or violent forms of exercise, he developed a certain

alert manner and ruggedness of character, without losing that winning, gentle manner which won everybody's liking and respect. At about this time he met Thomas Bentley, who recognized his talents and in turn introduced him to his partner, Josiah Wedgwood. When his father moved the shop to No. 420 on the Strand in the year 1775, we find young Flaxman working regularly for the famous English potter. William Blake, two years his junior, and Thomas Stothard were his bosom friends at the time, and together they frequented the "most agreeable conversaziones" in the drawing-rooms of the virtuous Aspasias whom we have already mentioned. In 1782 Flaxman married the admirable, if sententious Miss Anne Denman, and the famous prophesy of Sir Joshua, that Flaxman had ruined himself as an artist when he became a benedict, was among the few rebuffs which he ever suffered. "For a moment," writes the quaint and not altogether authoritative Allan Cunningham, "a cloud hung on Flaxman's brow, but this worthy couple understood each other too well to have their happiness seriously marred by the unguarded and peevish remark of a wealthy old bachelor." Mrs. Flaxman proved on the contrary to be an ideal helpmate and a devoted, inspiring companion. Her husband's modest in-

come at the time was increased by working as a collector of the rates and they lived frugally at 27 Wardour Street. Around their simple hearth there gathered a few choice friends,—among others the wealthy squire and poet, Thomas Hayley, who was to become the biographer of Romney and the patron of Blake. This rather maudlin writer's pretensions to connoisseurship were quite shallow, but he was a generous man and, having conceived a strong attachment for the Flaxmans, he invited them to spend their summers at Eartham, in Sussex, where Romney and Flaxman decorated certain rooms of his villa, and Blake was given boring commissions to make engravings for his patron's books. Wedgwood, who at first disliked Flaxman, also befriended him during these first years of married life, and in 1787 he advanced funds which enabled the couple to make an exhilarating pilgrimage to Italy, where Flaxman was to superintend the work of the potter's other modellers and draughtsmen. Wedgwood's opinion of his chief designer had materially altered, and there is a water-colour sketch of Flaxman by Jackson in the collection of Lord Leverhulme, accompanied by the following note, couched in terms of never-failing eighteenth-century courtesy: "Mr. Wedgwood presents his compliments to Mrs. Flaxman

and has the honour to present her with the portrait of the first artist of the age, which, from her knowledge of his many other good qualities, he flatters himself will be favourably received."

The tour of the happy pair closed the first period of Flaxman's career. He was already recognized as a distinguished sculptor, but chiefly by reason of his connection with the great Staffordshire potter, for whom he continued working regardless of the current studio opinion that he was degrading his talent by working for a tradesman. His intuition for elegant movement, his incontestable charm and delicacy, were peculiarly suited to Wedgwood's needs, but it is probable that these minute finikin labours crippled his powers when he attempted heroic groups. Flaxman spent seven idyllic years with his wife in the Eternal City, and made his abode most appropriately on the Via Felice, but, instead of seeking the solitude which most young artists regard as an essential condition for serious work, all strangers of distinction who passed through Rome from time to time were rather magnificently received by him. Naturally, the most profound study was no longer possible in the brilliant milieu which Flaxman thus created, but his work was nevertheless a great advance on the extravagances of Nollekens, Gibson and other pseudo-

classical rivals. His detractors claimed that he owed his popularity to his manner of living rather than to the quality of his work, but, in place of the popular mannerisms of the eighteenth century, he undoubtedly substituted a loftier, purer style, founded on the sound æsthetic principles which Winckelmann had rediscovered. He copied fine antiques like the Borghese vase, and his note-books and journals are filled with pregnant criticisms, and give ample evidence of his zealous interest not only in Greek art, but also in the Renaissance and the then depised Gothic. Many of his Roman groups were magnificently conceived but their life waned when Flaxman's artisans began to finish them in marble. It was a point of scrupulous honour with him to complete his work on time and it was physically impossible to devote sufficient care and thought to each group, especially when some of these were colossal in size.

In two fields, however, Flaxman achieved lasting and notable successes. These were the memorial tombstones—an art form favoured by Flaxman's Anglicanism—and the marvellously fine drawings. On the reliefs, he symbolised without triteness the homely Christian virtues and themes like sorrow, maternal tenderness, consolation or tranquil piety. Flaxman's embodi-

ments bear testimony to his devotional tendency and combine classical feeling and genuine pathos in a rare degree. Though frequently slightly mannered, Canova, his generous rival and admirer, thought they excelled all other contemporary sculptures. Their clarity and purity remind one of the lyric composition of Mendelssohn, and through such threnodies in stone, which fill the churches of England, and the amazingly beautiful drawings, may be traced Flaxman's lasting impression on English art. Had his manual dexterity and power of execution in marble equalled his exquisite sentiment and the nobility of his conceptions, as displayed in such original clay models as are preserved in the Flaxman Gallery of University College, Flaxman's renown as a sculptor would have been greatly enhanced.

While executing his marble sculptures, Flaxman turned as a relaxation to his childish amusement of illustrating. His most important series of designs are the thirty-nine drawings illustrating the *Iliad* and thirty-four for the *Odyssey*, commissioned by Mrs. Hare Naylor, about thirty-six drawings inspired by the tragedies of Æschylus made for the Dowager Countess Spencer, who paid a guinea apiece for them, and the drawings illustrating Dante's *Divine Comedy* executed for Thomas Hope. These facile, unpre-

tentious works are naturally of varying degrees of beauty, and frequently the artist not only interpreted a passage in two or three ways, but made important final changes while the approved drawing was being engraved. The plates soon achieved a world-wide success, became familiar to all students through the engravings of *Pilori*, *Piroli*, Blake and others, and were published almost simultaneously in England, France and Germany. The Homer first appeared in 1791, the Æschylus in 1794, and the Dante in 1806, but all have been frequently reprinted. Thomas Pilori, an Italian, the most popular engraver of the time, did most of the work of interpretation. His name carried weight with the public and his plates were even shipped to England for publication, but the *Odyssey* plates were lost at sea, and William Blake, who hated the task, had to hastily make a new set of temporary engravings at five guineas each for the first English edition, to take their place. Blake's style was not as suave as the Italian's but the fact is that all the engravers who intervened between the conceptions of the artist and his own expression, fell far short of the delightful originals, as may readily be seen by comparing the drawing and engraving of any particular design. Flaxman had a genuine flair for ringing the finest shades of sentiment out of

the slightest Homeric episode and when we turn the pages of one of the engraved folios in the dim shadows of a library, our commonplaces disappear and we join the assemblies of the radiant gods on Olympus, follow the fortunes of the glorious heroes of Troy, mingle with the graceful companions of Nausicaa, mourn with Achilles over the body of the youthful Patroclus or sail the perilous seas with crafty Ulysses. The pellucid beauty of the drawings is never meretricious. The lovely draperies with their slender folds, the subtly ordered combinations of figures, the economy of means employed, the Hellenic severity tempered by Flaxman's rare sweetness,—all these elements recall the highest periods of art, whereas the union of noble tenderness and dignified reticence exactly suited the temper of the sculptor's era. Amateurs were delighted with them, and it is to these drawings that the entire English school of sentimentalists, from Angelica Kauffmann downwards, may be traced. A fine spirituality seems to lurk about the works, and when they reached Romney he wrote quite soberly to their common friend Hayley: "I have seen the book of prints for the *Odyssey* by our dear and admirable artist Flaxman. They are simple, grand and pure; I may say with truth, very fine. They look as if they had been made in the age

when Homer wrote." Later when the morose painter heard that Flaxman was returning from Rome, he again wrote to their patron: "Though he is not here in person, I have caught a portion of his soul from the beautiful images of his Homer and Dante. I am charmed with them; they have thrown a light upon my mind that has dissipated some of its thick gloom." The talented Fuseli, who had charge of the Royal Academy collections, declared himself outdone, and Canova extolled them. Lord Byron, speaking of the Dante drawings, said that Flaxman's designs constituted the best translation of the Italian poet's work, and the ponderous philosopher Schlegel, chief among German critics of the time, also lauded the drawings in his most vehement Teutonic manner. In after years, when he was the artistic oracle of fashionable London, Flaxman assured his auditors that the most successful of his figures displayed in his illustrations of Homer, Æschylus and Dante were procured from innocent street vagrants and similarly natural and unsophisticated sources. The drawings are, indeed, instinct with inspiration and animation which only nature can give, but he carefully studied classic sources as well. The designs have the inexhaustible gift of suggestion that the old vase drawings can boast of, but although he made

their beauties his own, and his designs are archæologically correct, they are never mere pastiches of Greek originals. He handles this antique world in a wonderfully penetrative way, as though he enjoyed some subtle affinity with Hellenism, and all the works are characterised by a serene vigour and placid elegance which easily justify their universal celebrity. Side by side with the Greek designs mentioned, his supple talent followed the various stages of the celestial voyage of Bunyan's *Pilgrim*, and there are three drawings for Cowper's translation of Milton's Latin poems (1810), another light amusing set of ten for a Chinese tale, *The Casket* (1812), forty drawings for Sotheby's translation of *Oberon*, and thirty-six fine designs inspired by Hesiod, successfully engraved by William Blake in 1817. On October 2, 1796, his wife's birthday, he presented her with forty outline drawings. These illustrate a poem of his own, entitled, *The Knight of the Blazing Cross*, and are now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

We in America have at length a representative group of these delightful works, hitherto accessible to European students only. All are from the collection of Thomas Hope (1770-1831) for whom Flaxman made his marble group, "Cephalus and Aurora," and Benjamin West

painted some of his classical pictures like the charming "Narcissus and Echo." Hope was a talented amateur, belonged to an enormously rich family of Dutch merchants and settled in England in 1796, when the French occupied Holland. After he had made extensive travels incident to his study of architecture, he spent his fortune encouraging contemporary art and collecting sculpture, Italian pictures and antique vases. These he placed in his mansion at Deepdene near Dorking, in Surrey, and the house became a point of pilgrimage for classical students. His own talents as an architect were of no mean order, and besides his work on the "Costume of the Ancients" and contributions to the art of Interior Decoration, he was the anonymous author of "Anastasius, or Memoirs of a Greek, written at the close of the eighteenth century," and published in 1819. This book enjoyed such a great vogue that Hope's bitter enemy Lord Byron, to whom it was attributed, confessed to the Countess of Blessington that he was moved to tears on reading it, for two reasons,—one that he had not written it, and the other that Hope had. Sydney Smith too, was amazed that "the man of chairs and tables, the gentleman of sofas" could pen descriptions "not unworthy of Tacitus and not excelled by Byron." Hope's collections were

recently scattered, and some of his choicest Greek vases, paintings and drawings, have found their way into our museums and private collections.

While the merits of the drawings of Flaxman were highly appreciated as soon as they made their appearance in weak engraved form, their unique importance and influence have not been adequately studied or commented upon. Meier-Graefe one of the best of contemporary critics, seems to have felt their power, for he places them on a level beyond the reach of William Blake. "It is difficult to understand," he asserts, "why the strange nimbus that encircles Blake should have been conferred upon him rather than upon his compatriot Flaxman. Some of Flaxman's outline drawings illustrating Dante seem to me more valuable than all Blake's illustrations put together." On the other hand, it is true that Blake's vigorous genius undoubtedly affected Flaxman, who extolled the mystical drawings, claimed that they were equal to those of Michael Angelo, and added that "his poems are as grand as his pictures." When Cary, the translator of Dante, referred slightly to Blake's powers, Flaxman was deeply offended. Touched by the quality of his friend's poetical gifts, Flaxman began early to show his generous, kindly attitude by counselling the publication in 1783 of that

excessively rare octavo volume, "*Poetical Sketches by W. B.*," and after joining with the Rev. Mathew in the expense, they presented the entire edition to the poet, to dispose of to his own advantage. Flaxman may also have introduced Blake to Wedgwood, for whom he engraved a show list of the potter's productions, and then he secured for him the patronage of Hayley. In 1800 Blake was persuaded to take up his residence with that writer in Sussex and to make engravings for his *Life of Cowper*. He was at first extravagant in recognition of his indebtedness, addressing a charming poem to Mrs. Flaxman, and repeatedly wrote letters to his "dear sculptor of Eternity," and "sublime archangel." A poem dated September 12, 1800, published in Sampson's fine variorum edition, is addressed:

"To My Dearest Friend John Flaxman These Lines:  
I bless thee, O Father of Heaven and Earth! that  
ever I saw Flaxman's face.

Angels stand round my spirit in Heaven, the blessed  
of Heaven are my friends upon Earth.

When Flaxman was taken to Italy, Fuseli was given  
to me for a Season.

And now Flaxman hath given me Hayley, his  
friend, to be mine—such my lot upon Earth."

Secretly, however, he despised both Flaxman  
and his host Hayley, who was really sensitive

to the originality of Blake's talents, and in the famous Rossetti manuscript, owned by Mr. W. A. White of Brooklyn, are found many effusions like the following couplet:

"My title as a genius thus is proved—  
Not praised by Hayley, nor by Flaxman loved."

His strange nature forgot every kindness. It galled him to observe careers like Flaxman's, the success and harmony of which nothing seemed ever to mar. Nor could his wild spirit brook Hayley's conventional banalities and, after a residence of three years at Eartham, he broke off all relations with the writer rather than offer his genius to serve such offices. An account of the social relations of these three men would make a fascinating study of the artistic temperament, but we are immediately concerned only with the very real artistic debt which Flaxman and Blake owed one another. Blake in the Rossetti manuscript wrote: "Flaxman cannot deny that one of the very first monuments he did I gratuitously designed for him, and at the same time he was blasting my character to Macklin, my employer, as Macklin told me at the time. How much of his Homer and Dante he will allow to be mine I do not know, as he went far enough off to publish them, even to Italy, but the public will

know." Students will recall that Linnell, who in 1818 became Blake's chief friend and disciple, commissioned the artist to execute a set of designs for Dante, and that work on these was begun about the year 1821, more than fifteen years after Flaxman's designs had become familiar to the public. Even laying aside such evidence, however, we have only to compare the earlier and cruder, if more powerful drawings of Blake, with those made after he had engraved some of Flaxman's designs to recognize his debt to the sculptor. Flaxman's rather soothing influence may not always have been for the better, but Blake could not have missed the monumental symmetry, the gem-like purity and simplicity of his friend's drawings. Flaxman was an exponent of mild rapture and innocence and only rarely of horror or passion. He seized upon the homely domestic virtues, the joys of kinship or the pain of loss, and expressed these in large abstract forms with the greatest variety and ever-increasing profundity, making the beauty of the gestures permanent and universal in appeal. Romney, as we have seen, succumbed to their charms, and Lawrence's Homeric drawings, now scattered through American collections, show that he too had familiarised himself with their staid and quiet loveliness. His strength did not lie in the

field of violent emotion, and his giants, demons and furies, as compared with Blake's, are gently reassuring in spite of their fearsome visages. A unique sentiment, using the word in the finest sense, was the mainspring of his fertile art. His science, taste and thorough training made him a master of the human form treated abstractly, but he had the defects of his good qualities, and only the captious critic will contrast his spontaneous flow of invention, superb technical beauty, infinite grace, clarity and harmony, with Blake's childish extravagant genius, mysticism, unpolished directness and his tremendous conceptions. Flaxman's drawings place him on a level with the most consummate draughtsmen of all times, whereas Blake's unparalleled imagination was in rebellion against and crippled his technical power.

We have noted that in Germany the praise of Schlegel coupled with the interest aroused by Winckelmann in matters Hellenistic made Flaxman immensely popular, and the influence which his drawings exerted on Continental art is clearly traceable. In France, although the art of England was at that time despised, Flaxman was described as the "*merveilleux evocateur des chants homériques*," but the debt of that country to Flaxman has only recently begun to be recog-

nised. When Flaxman went to Paris with Benjamin West in 1802 after the peace of Amiens, to view Napoleon's precious spoils, he stiffly declined any interchange of civilities and courtesies with the French artists, who in Flaxman's opinion were instrumental and responsible for the ransacking of Italy. Religion was a living principle with him, influencing not only his life but his work. "The Reverend John Flaxman" he was jestingly called by the obstreperous Fuseli, and the epithet was a happy one, for Flaxman, like a rigid Puritan, held immorality in absolute horror, and would never excuse or condone it on the ground of the brilliance or cleverness of the artistic sinner. Just as his Bacchanales were not religious frenzies but merely patriarchal ceremonies, psalms and hymns in stone, so his political conduct was maintained consistently with moral principles which compelled him to refuse to meet the Emperor or his official painter, David, whom he had condemned in an open letter dated 1797. All regicides and atheists were avoided and the palm of beauty was awarded to the incomparable Ingres. It was probably on the strength of Flaxman's influential expression of opinion that Ingres won the Grand Prize of Rome with his *Achilles and the Ambassadors of Agamemnon*, and Ingres in turn paid

Flaxman a compliment by giving him a prominent position in the famous *Homage to Homer*, begun in the year of Flaxman's death. The greatest of French draughtsmen possessed an original drawing by the English master, depicting the bound Prometheus visited by the Oceanides, and this was treasured along with the sketches of Raphael and the manuscripts of Mozart and Gluck. In his note-books preserved in the museum at Montauban, the great Frenchman repeatedly refers with intense interest and admiration to Flaxman, and he unquestionably borrowed the Jupiter of Flaxman's *Iliad* when he painted the *Homage to Homer*, in which the English sculptor may be seen standing beside Mme. Dacier to the right of the enthroned blind poet. Both artists became as it were mediators between the realism of modern times and the formal austere idealism of the ancients. Through Ingres, the influence of Flaxman extended to Flandrin, Chasserieu and to Ary Scheffer, who must have known the Dante drawing *La bocca mi baccio tutto tremanti* when he painted his *Paolo and Francesca*. Furthermore it is a curious fact that Ingres as well as Flaxman owe their immortality partly to occasional drawings, executed for slight remuneration.

When in 1794 the Flaxmans returned to

London from Rome, with a collection of casts for Romney, they took commodious quarters in Buckingham Street, Fitzroy Square, where the household included his sister-in-law, Maria Denman, and his half-sister, Mary Ann Flaxman, thirteen years his junior and herself favourably known as an artist. Their life was very happy and in his famous diary, Henry Crabbe Robinson, gives charming vignettes of the pleasant spirit which reigned there. He always saw the New Year in at their home, which boasted the society of the Hayleys, Samuel Rogers, Stothard, Sir Thomas Lawrence and Romney. In 1795, the last year of his activity, Romney painted the original of the well-known picture in the National Portrait Gallery, showing the sculptor at work on the bust of Hayley, with the latter's son in the background. It became the subject of an unfortunate and unseemly wrangle between Hayley and Romney's son, and was finally put into the possession of Thomas Greene, who was Romney's solicitor. Lawrence has also left fine souvenirs of his visits in the shape of two beautiful portrait drawings of Flaxman and his wife, whom he highly esteemed. There is, indeed, not a single dissenting voice in the chorus which all the commentators of the period sing in Flaxman's praise, for the elevation of thought

which characterised him as an artist marked him as a man. Even the suspicious Romney loved and admired him, and Crabbe Robinson takes pleasure in amplifying all the contemporary descriptions of his "good-humoured, even frolicsome, kindhearted" friend.

Signal honours, dignities and important commissions came thick and fast after his return from Italy, where he was made a member of the Ancient Academy of St. Luke's. During his absence, Sir Joshua had died and, by the irony of fate, his reproved sculptor was now deemed the most worthy to execute the statue in his honour which now stands under the dome of St. Paul's. In 1797 he became an Associate of the English Royal Academy, and in 1800, on presenting it with his *Apollo and Marpessa*—fine in conception but as usual weak in execution—he was made a full Academician. In 1810 a chair of sculpture was created for him and in connection with this office he delivered the ten lectures which have come down to us. An entry in sensible Crabbe Robinson's diary on February 18th, 1811, reads as follows: "At the Royal Academy. Heard Flaxman's introductory lecture on Sculpture. It was for the most part, or entirely, historical. He endeavoured to show that in all times English sculptors have excelled when not

prevented by extraneous circumstances. This gave great pleasure to a British audience. In one or two instances, the lecture was applauded in a way that he would be ashamed of. — — — He spoke like an artist who loved and honoured his art, but without any personal feeling. He had all the unpretending simplicity of a truly great man. His unimposing figure received consequence from the animation of his countenance; and his voice, though feeble, was so judiciously managed and so clear, and his enunciation was so distinct, that he was audible to a large number of people." As printed, the lectures make dull reading, for Flaxman was not an artist in words, but his admiration for primitive Greek, Gothic and Egyptian prove that his taste and judgment were far in advance of his time. He contributed various anonymous articles to the old encyclopædia of Rees and he was one of the experts called to pass upon the wisdom of the acquisition of the Elgin marbles by the English nation. His professorial and social activities did not diminish his ardour for work and he was busy with a vast number of monuments. Almost one hundred of his works are listed in the catalogue of the Royal Academy exhibitions alone and how many more abound in the cathedrals of England, no one has as yet taken the trouble to tell. It is

small wonder that in these he so often failed to preserve to the end of his labours the force of his original inspiration and impulse, as he did in the drawings.

Toward the end of his career, Flaxman became interested in applied art. In 1817 he designed a charming classical tripod, presented to the actor John Kemble, and he began the still more important *Shield of Achilles* for the eminent silversmiths, Rundell & Bridge. For this singularly involved and very skillful ring-shaped composition, inspired by the celebrated eighteenth book of the *Iliad*, he received £620, and replicas in silver were made for George IV and other distinguished personages. A plaster copy about three feet in diameter was in the collection of Sir Thomas Lawrence, who led contemporary criticism by praising it extravagantly, as unsurpassed even by Michael Angelo,—“a divine work; unequalled in its combination of beauty, variety and grandeur.”

Flaxman's career suffered a fatal blow when his wife died, after several strokes, on February 6, 1820. He had always been interested in Swedenborgianism and he now became more mystical and melancholy. He had been intimate with Blake for many years, and we learn with no great surprise that Sharp, the engraver, also a

spiritualist, invited Flaxman to lead the Jews back to Jerusalem and become their chief architect to rebuild the Temple. While nothing came of this, he withdrew more and more from society and devoted himself to his work. In 1822 he addressed the Royal Academy on the occasion of the death of his Italian admirer, Canova, and in the following year, when he was finishing his *Cupid, Psyche, Raphael, Michael Angelo* and other figures, his tasks were pleasantly interrupted by a visit from Schlegel. He had finished the exterior decorations for Covent Garden and was at work on designs for Buckingham Palace when he became ill. Allan Cunningham gives us a curious account of his last days. It appears that an admirer arrived at the sculptor's studio with an Italian book. "Sir," said the visitor, "it was so generally believed throughout Italy that you were dead, that my friend, the author, determined to show the world how much he esteemed your genius, and having this book ready for publication, he has inscribed it '*Al Ombra di Flaxman.*'" Flaxman smiled, and accepted the volume with unaffected modesty. This occurred on Saturday, the 2nd of December, when he was well and cheerful. The next day he was taken suddenly ill with cold, and the 7th (1826) he was dead. He was buried in the burial ground of

St. Giles-in-the Fields, near the old St. Pancras Church, accompanied by the President and Council of the Royal Academy, which exhibited his statue of John Kemble in the following year.

The entire nation mourned him and shortly afterwards Sir Thomas Lawrence delivered a eulogy on his deceased friend to the students of the Academy. This estimate of Sir Thomas, though obviously friendly, contains some subtle criticism. To us, the drawings which are now universally recognised to be his most important works have a special contemporary significance. They afford a kind of standard by which any artist might take the measure of his graphic ability. The power of Van Gogh, the theoretical importance of Picasso, and the dignified failures of the post-impressionists have temporarily blinded us to obvious beauty. We need something to liberate us from the tyranny of our more or less ugly mode in art, and these superb drawings, incisive, suave, tender or voluptuous, vigorous and yet serene, ærial in their delicacy, quiet in their loveliness and elegant in execution, like the playing of Heifetz and Casals, or the singing of Galli-Curci, will again exercise their imperishable influence and help to carry us back to a time when the highest form of civilised life was a manifestation of noble beauty.

SCOTT & FOWLES.

# CATALOGUE

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- 2 Thetis calling Briareus to the assistance of  
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- 3 Jupiter sending the evil dream to Agamem-  
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- 4 Venus presenting Helen to Paris
- 5 The Council of the Gods
- 6 Otus and Ephialtes holding Mars captive
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- 8 Hector chiding Paris
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- 10 Hector and Ajax separated by the Heralds
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- 16 Sleep escaping from the wrath of Jupiter
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- 22 Vulcan and Thetis
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## THE ODYSSEY

- 27 The descent of Minerva to Ithaca
- 28 Penelope surprised by the suitors
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- 34 Leucothea saving Ulysses
- 35 Minerva and the Winds
- 36 Ulysses following the car of Nausicaa
- 37 Ulysses presenting himself to Alcinous
- 38 The Song of Demodocus
- 39 Ulysses and the giant Polyphemus
- 40 Circe and Ulysses
- 41 Ulysses terrified by the Ghosts
- 42 Morning
- 43 Morning (Study for the engraved drawing)
- 44 Scylla
- 45 Lampetia complaining to Apollo
- 46 Ulysses asleep, laid on his own coast by the  
sailors
- 47 Apollo and Diana
- 48 Minerva restores Ulysses to his own shape
- 49 Ulysses and his dog
- 50 Ulysses preparing to fight Irus

- 51 Euryclea discovers Ulysses
  - 52 The Harpies and the daughters of Pandarus
  - 53 Penelope carrying Ulysses' bow to the  
suitsors
  - 54 Ulysses killing the suitsors
  - 55 The meeting of Ulysses and Penelope
  - 56 Mercury conducting the souls of the suitsors  
to the Infernal Regions
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- 57 The title page of Æschylus
  - 58 Oceanus (Prometheus chained)
  - 59 Drawing for "Seven Chiefs against Thebes"
  - 60 Orestes
  - 61 Blind Œdipus and his daughter
  - 62 Study for a drawing for Dante
  - 63 A drawing for Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress
  - 64 Two figures from nature
  - 65 Sketches on blue paper
  - 66 Sleep escaping from the wrath of Jupiter
  - 67 Drawing for "Seven Chiefs against Thebes"
  - 68 The Gods descend to battle
  - 69 Study for a drawing for the Iliad
  - 70 Dante and Virgil (Inferno, Canto 13)
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- 71 Portrait of John Flaxman by Sir Thomas  
Lawrence
- 72 Portrait of Mrs. Flaxman by Sir Thomas  
Lawrence
- 73 Photogravure of the Terra Cotta Portrait  
of Flaxman by himself

